

Testimony to comment on raised bill SB 376 An Act Concerning Authorization of State Grant Commitments for School Building Projects and Concerning Changes to the Statutes Concerning School Building Projects.

My name is Kerry Swift. I am a member of the Connecticut Foundation for Environmentally Safe Schools (ConnFESS), and the parent of three children in Brookfield Public Schools. The ConnFESS School Ventilation Position Statement that was recently revised states, "Optimal ventilation systems have rarely been installed in schools due to pressures to reduce design and construction costs as well as a lack of awareness of the key role a ventilation system has in diluting and flushing out the concentration of indoor pollutants." Over the last seven years I have observed first-hand the truth of this statement. Unfortunately, the promise of optimal ventilation in our high school still remains unrealized.

Early in 2003, our town was asked to vote for an addition/renovation to Brookfield High School, due to growing population and to bring the school into code compliance. The school had originally been built in a series of five additions beginning in 1959, with the last area added in 1974. The building was sorely in need of renovation, and a broad committee of stakeholders was pulled together to develop a plan for the school. Considerable time and public input was spent developing what came to be called the "Consensus Plan"

The brochure asking for an affirmative vote for this "Consensus Plan" was mailed to every household in Brookfield. One of the bullet-pointed benefits listed on this brochure reads: "Fresh, clean air ventilation and circulation throughout building."

Brookfield has a strong choral and band program. Unfortunately, the rooms that house these popular programs at the high school are small for the number of children and windowless. Due to numerous delays, major construction was still taking place during my oldest daughter's freshman year of high school. I especially heard complaints regarding the hot, stuffy conditions in her chorus room. As a fundraiser, the teacher was even selling cold bottled water to the desperate children. As conditions in the room didn't improve into her sophomore year, I began to question where our "fresh, clean air ventilation" was and how a room that often held classes of 40 to 50 kids, who are expected to sing, could be so difficult to breathe in.

In answer to my persistent questions, I was shown a copy of the schematics for the renovation. The "fresh, clean air ventilation" was really only a refurbishment of existing air handlers, all of which were over or approaching forty years old. I was

shocked to see that even this refurbishment of these old air handlers was listed as an "add alternate", and as such, was one of the first items deleted when the project came in over budget after the first bids were opened. Even worse, as part of the construction it had been deemed necessary to remove some of the rooftop ventilation units and these had not been replaced.

My daughter is now winding down her senior year. She loves to sing and is still a member of chorus. After years of constant complaints from students, parents and the teachers regarding the stuffy conditions of the windowless choral and band rooms, the administration finally admitted months ago that the ventilation unit which serves this area is broken beyond repair. They are hoping to replace this unit this summer. However, they aren't guaranteeing this will be done as it's listed last on the capital list for this year, meaning if the budget is cut at all, this item will be pushed off for another year.

It is my firm belief that if ventilation upgrade/replacement was a reimbursable item, we would have our "fresh, clean air ventilation and circulation" in the high school. Instead, we are left with old inefficient units in some places, units that don't work at all in others, and in some areas, ventilation units have been removed with no plans for replacement.

As a result of my experience I am requesting that legislative language be added to SB 376 that will make school HVAC repair and upgrades reimbursable while including the Proposed Components for CT HVAC Legislation for Schools that I have attached to my testimony. Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

## CT Foundation for Environmentally Safe Schools

A nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting policies, practices and resources that protect school occupants from environmental health hazards

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### Proposed Components for CT HVAC Legislation for Schools

As legislation is crafted to address HVAC systems and IAQ it is important to be cognizant of the following factors:

1. Unlike IAQ laws in California and Maine, Connecticut statutes do not require all schools to conduct annual HVAC inspections
2. Strong requirements for HVAC design, operations and maintenance have been established by CT's High Performance Building Standards for State Buildings and the 2003 IAQ for schools law. These should be reviewed and incorporated into legislative language.
3. The Connecticut State Department of Education's School Facilities Survey (ED050) does not have specific questions that track compliance with existing statutes that require:
  - a. Operating HVAC systems continuously during the hours in which students and staff occupy school facilities
  - b. Staff training on ventilation system for optimal energy efficiency and superior IAQ.
  - c. Keeping HVAC maintenance records on file for five years.

When existing statutes are not being adequately audited for compliance an inherent underlying message is conveyed that they are not very important and become, in reality, "optional". When this mindset takes hold school officials become complacent and disengaged from the ongoing vigilance and planning that must be in place to avoid an IAQ crisis.

ConnFESS enthusiastically supports making the upgrade and repair of HVAC systems eligible for school construction reimbursement as long as minimum standards are established in order for school districts to qualify for such funding. ConnFESS recommends that these minimum requirements include:

1. Selected regulations from the CT High Performance Building Standards that specifically deal with energy efficiency, ventilation, IAQ and the commissioning of building systems.
2. Local school districts must commit to:
  - a. Providing documentation that proves compliance with existing and new IAQ /HVAC statutes.
  - b. Maintaining a written indoor air quality management plan based on the US EPA's Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools Programs or its equivalent to be directed by a designated IAQ coordinator.

- c. Participating in free training when it is offered by the State Department of Public Health related to HVAC and IAQ.

In addition, we respectfully request that this legislation also require:

1. All Connecticut schools to annually inspect HVAC systems and post these inspections on school and/or school district web sites.
2. The State Department of Education to revise the School Facilities Survey to include specific questions that clearly track existing and new statutes dealing with ventilation, energy efficiency and IAQ, as well as the commissioning of building systems.

These recommendations are designed to improve accountability, transparency and to encourage the implementation of research based best practices. Without these minimum standards in place for all Connecticut schools as well as those aimed at school districts that would apply for funding of HVAC repair and upgrades, the State of Connecticut could inadvertently reward neglect and poor management of school facilities.

As our state moves to decrease school construction grants due to more limited bonding and debt service capacity, we support legislation that will make smaller projects to upgrade and repair HVAC systems eligible for reimbursement because such allocations could:

1. Promote:
  - a. Job growth
  - b. Use of green technologies in schools
  - c. Cost savings through energy efficiency
  - d. Increased public awareness of the substantial role of HVAC systems in creating healthier, safer, and more productive learning environments
  - e. Proven benefits of superior IAQ such as improved test scores, attendance, and teacher retention
2. Protect:
  - a. The health of our students, teachers and staff from sick building syndrome and building related illnesses
  - b. The considerable long-term local and state investments made in our school facilities
  - c. The environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions
3. Prevent:
  - a. Accelerated deterioration and reduced efficiency of a school's physical plant
  - b. Negative publicity that damages a school's public image
  - c. Strained relationships between parents, teachers, administration and school officials
  - d. Liability issues and workers compensation claims
  - e. Serious IAQ problems that could force the closing of a school

We thank the Education Committee for proposing legislation that acknowledges the vital role school HVAC systems play in creating healthy and productive learning environments.